

VZCZCXRO1716
PP RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHAH #0196/01 0381230
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071230Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0229
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3349
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1165
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1033
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1602
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2193

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000196

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, ECA
AID/W FOR EE/EA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CHALLENGES ABOUND ON ROAD TO

REFORM IN EDUCATION

REF: ASHGABAT 0179

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A recent visit by a World Bank delegation focused on education provided the delegation with an opportunity to learn more about the challenges and changes to Turkmenistan's education system. Donors told the delegation that a bureaucracy, more used to hunkering down than innovation, is one impediment to reform. The possibility that an obstructive Ministry of Education International Department head may also be a close friend of the president is another. Beyond that, with as many as 400 official visits during 2007, Turkmenistan officials may feel inundated. Nevertheless, help from international donors is necessary to push reform forward. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) World Bank Senior Economist for Human Development for Europe and Central Asia Dina Abu-Ghaida and Country Human Development Sector Coordinator Isak Froumin met January 27 with representatives of donor countries to discuss education in Turkmenistan. Froumin said they had met Minister of Education Muhametgeldi Annaamanov and found him more open than they had expected as well as sensible and down-to-earth. A follow-up meeting with Ministry department heads was less positive. They described International Department head Nury Bayramov as particularly difficult and said the other heads had little to say. (NOTE: See para six below. END NOTE.) Donors offered that one problem could be that with as many as 400 official visits during 2007, Turkmenistan officials may feel inundated.

PROBLEMS IN THE BUREAUCRACY

13. (C) UK Embassy Projects Officer Shemshat Mukhammetkulieva described other problems plaguing the education sector. She said President Berdimuhamedov has many ideas regarding reform, but barriers are often put up by the old guard who inhabit the bureaucracy. Therefore, it is very difficult to implement new proposals. Mukhammetkulieva predicted that change will take time, because the bureaucracy is still

largely composed of people who survived the Niyazov era by hunkering down and listening to the top. She said the Turkmen will need outside help, such as from international donors, in learning to work from the bottom up.

14. (C) Mukhammetkulieva noted that generally there is problem of communication - both vertically and horizontally - within the government. For example, there is a lack of communication due to a sense of rivalry between the Supreme Council for Science and Technology, which is supposed to set the standards for the newly re-established graduate degrees, and the Ministry of Education, which has the responsibility for meeting those standards.

NURY'S PROTECTOR

15. (C) Mukhammetlieva offered an explanation of why Ministry of Education International Department head Bayramov has, despite the president's calls for more exchanges, been able successfully to obstruct programs with international donors. She claimed Bayramov is a personal friend of Berdimuhamedov, and therefore, no one is willing to challenge him. Despite the fact that embassies complain about him, she said, it will be very difficult to do something about him.

16. (C) COMMENT: One of the more intriguing mysteries in Ashgabat is Bayramov. The U.S. and European embassies are unanimous that he is the single biggest roadblock to education-reform cooperation. Charge has complained about him by name to Foreign Minister Meredov, who only chuckled in embarrassment. If Bayramov is Berdimuhamedov's personal friend, why doesn't he implement the president's frequently-stated desire for assistance from the United

ASHGABAT 00000196 002 OF 002

States and Europe? Is he beholden to someone (or some place) else? We, as do others, perceive him as an egotistical, oily snake. Could he simply be Soviet old-guard and so sure of himself that he flouts the president's policies with impunity? We don't want to fall into the good-tsar-bad-boyar trap, but we do believe Berdimuhamedov is sincere when he tells U.S. visitors, as he most recently did Senator Richard Lugar in January, he cannot understand why the United States is not more forthcoming on education-reform cooperation. END COMMENT.

CHANGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

17. (SBU) Donors listed a number of changes in the education system since Berdimuhamedov came to power, including the restoration of 10th grade. They noted there are new courses, including a new health course, the reintroduction of a teacher training course, and the proposed social studies course, which could replace the teaching of former president Niyazov's Ruhnama. Beyond these curriculum changes, the country will open a state governance and law institute, an Institute of Strategic Planning, a new medical university, a branch university of Moscow State University, an institute of culture, a new agricultural university in Dashaguz, a power institute in Mary, and an oil and gas institute in Balkan province. The number of new places for students in universities has increased, a journalism department has been added, and Russian Language department is planned.

18. (SBU) One concern with the increase in university students and courses, is whether there will be enough professors. Many former professors left for Russia and Europe years ago, and it may be difficult to convince them to come back. In addition, their "changed mentalities" from living abroad may make them less suitable in the government's eyes for teaching here.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: While there have been some changes for the better in education since Berdimuhamedov came to power, many serious challenges persist. Donors were able to give the World Bank a lot of good food for thought on how to provide

assistance in this vital sector. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND